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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/07/2017
TAGS: PREL ETRD ETTC CU IT
SUBJECT: ITALY AND CUBA: NSC-DIRECTED REVIEW FOR LIBERTAD
TITLE III SUSPENSION

REF: A. STATE 65523

1B. ROME 1029
1C. HAVANA 298
1D. DERETIC-YOUNG E-MAIL

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor David D. Pearce for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) There has been little change in Italy's relationship with Cuba in the past six months. The most significant event in bilateral relations this period was a visit by Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque to Rome on March 15. In his meeting with Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema, the GOI ensured the main topic of conversation was the human rights situation in Cuba (refs b and c). The Italian Embassy in Havana continued to meet with opposition leaders as part of Italy's two-track approach to engage both Cuban government officials and the opposition. Italy did not participate in exchange programs with Cuba. There was no significant change in the level of Italian investment, joint ventures, or tourism in Cuba.

12. (C) A small group of Italian parliamentarians continued to put pressure on the Italian government to engage more with the democratic opposition, especially by providing internet access at the Italian Embassy. Labor rights activists urged Italian companies in Cuba to implement socially responsible practices, including by organizing a day-long meeting on the subject May 15, co-sponsored by the small center-left ruling coalition party Partito Radicale and the International Group for Corporate Social Responsibility in Cuba (GIRSCC). Telecom Italia's contribution to GOC repression was also criticized (ref D). MFA Under Secretary for Human Rights Gianni Vernetti said the GOI was looking for concrete ways to increase support to the Cuban opposition (perhaps by using NGOs similar to the National Endowment for Democracy). However, he stressed the difficulty of funding opposition parties because of the possible negative effects on the opposition from GOC retaliation.

13. (C) Italy favors lifting EU suspended sanctions and increased contact with GOC officials. By engaging with the GOC, Italian officials argue, the international community can find and exploit differences of opinion and divisions within the Cuban Communist Party. However, Italy also believed strongly in engaging with opposition figures and noted the GOI would only send a high level representative to Havana if the GOC allowed the official to meet with members of the opposition. Italian officials did not see repression increasing in Cuba (ref B).

¶4. (C) Comment: Embassy Rome recommends the continuation of Italy's waiver under Title III as important to helping Italy maintain positions critical of the GOC. End Comment.

Spogli